
Health Care **EPP** Network Information Exchange

Environmentally Preferable Purchasing News for Health Care Organizations

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What is Environmentally Preferable Purchasing?

A hospital's choice to buy more environmentally favored products is only part of a larger system of a hospital's practices that support the integrity of both business and environmental decisions.

"Environmentally Preferable Purchasing" includes purchasing products and services whose environmental impacts have been found to be superior to competing products. This can be as simple as buying recycled paper or as complex as evaluating 10 different environmental attributes of a medical device.

Many private sector organizations are beginning to incorporate environmental attributes into their purchasing programs. Kaiser Permanente, a national HMO, asks for information on the environmental attributes of the products offered by vendors and incorporates this information into its purchasing decisions. Group Health in King County, Washington asks vendors to take back packaging materials and works with vendors to develop reusable packaging, such as totes, so that less cardboard waste is generated. Catholic Healthcare West brought environmental points into its agreement with a Group Purchasing Organization, Premier (see below).

The Healthcare Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Network

The Healthcare Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Network was founded by the Massachusetts Office of Technical Assistance for Toxics Use Reduction, the Sustainable Hospitals Project of the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, and Health Care Without Harm. It first met in July, 1999 and currently holds meetings every other month. Its mission is to promote the use of environmental purchasing to reduce health and environmental risks from the very facilities dedicated to promoting health.

The Network participants thus far have included healthcare facility staff responsible for environmental health and safety, facility management, and purchasing. Members who attend meetings have the opportunity to exchange information and strategies for implementing environmental purchasing at their institutions. All members are working together to improve the common store of information concerning environmental purchasing for health care.

For more information please contact Lara Sutherland, at the Massachusetts Office of Technical Assistance for Toxics Use Reduction. Phone: 617-626-1091
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Environmental Purchasing Success Story

Catholic Healthcare West (CHW), a 46-member health care group based in the Western United States, believes that ensuring its operations do not harm the environment is integral to its mission. CHW has adopted the operating principles of the Coalition of Environmentally Responsible Economies and is working actively to bring environmental considerations into purchasing practices. Catholic Healthcare West brought this environmental commitment to its negotiations with Premier, a national Group Purchasing Organization, by putting these points into the Operating Principles of the Catholic Healthcare West-Premier Partnership:

- Premier and Catholic Healthcare West will support the Coalition for the Environmentally Responsible Economies, the Health Care Without Harm campaign, and reduction of the volume and toxicity of the medical waste stream.
- Premier will assist Catholic Healthcare West in identifying products that contain mercury and PVCs.
- Premier will consider the environmental impact of a product or service when selecting goods and services.
- Premier will communicate the desire for environmentally favorable products to manufacturers.
- Premier will work with Catholic Healthcare West to resolve conflicts between Catholic Healthcare West's environmental policies and Premier's policies.

For more information, see <http://www.chw.edu/community/letter.asp> or contact Tim Washburn at 602-307-2654.

American Hospital Association and US EPA Team Up To Study EPP

A landmark public-private partnership between the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the American Hospital Association (AHA) received the 1999 Hammer Award from the Office of the Vice President for excellence in reinventing government through its innovative method of reducing hospital pollution without further regulation. This partnership, established in June of 1998 by the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the two parties, outlines an agreement to virtually eliminate mercury-containing waste from the health care waste stream by the year 2005, and to achieve a 50% reduction in total hospital waste by 2010 through voluntary programs.

As a part of this overall effort, an Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) Workgroup has been established to examine the issue of the use of environmentally preferable products in health care institutions. The workgroup is currently writing a Model EPP Plan for hospitals, and the model plan will be incorporated into an educational curriculum geared toward hospitals. The EPA and AHA plan to sponsor training sessions across the country over the next few years, showing hospitals how to save money and reduce liability by implementing these and other environmental programs. For more information contact Chen Wen at EPA (202-260-4109) or Kathy Svedman at the American Hospital Association/American Society for Healthcare Environmental Services (312-422-3861).

Greening the Hospital Supply Chain

In an article in *Corporate Environmental Strategy* (Winter 1999), James Messelbeck and Michael Whaley argue that health care delivery institutions will be a driving force in the greening of companies that manufacture products for the health care industry. As hospitals look to improve their own environmental performance, they will be looking for products that do not contribute excessively to the waste stream or to environmental liability.

An effort to make the pharmaceutical and biomedical research industry more environmentally aware is already underway at the National Association of Physicians for the Environment (NAPE). NAPE is sponsoring a conference on November 1 and 2 at NIH in Bethesda, Maryland to bring all stakeholders together and investigate ways to reduce the environmental impact of the products of biomedical research. NAPE has organized many committees to supply reports to the conference, and James Messelbeck chairs the committee on Environmental Product Design. For more information contact James Messelbeck at 714-433-7610 or check out www.napenet.org.

Assistance is Available to Implement Environmentally Preferable Purchasing

The Sustainable Hospital Project (SHP) at UMass Lowell

The University of Massachusetts at Lowell, already famous for its pioneering work in toxics use reduction, has set up a Sustainable Hospitals Project at its Lowell Center for Sustainable Production.

One of the resources already available through the Project is the internet-based clearinghouse, which provides quick access to a wide range of resources pertinent to healthcare, including product and vendor information on safe and environmentally friendly products, such as thermometers, sphygmomanometers, medical gloves, and alternatives to PVC products. If you are searching for a replacement for a mercury thermometer or blood pressure equipment, this is a good place to look. You can reach the website at <http://www.uml.edu/centers/LCSP/hospitals>, email the staff at shp@uml.edu, or call them at 978-934-3386.

The website information is complemented by a knowledgeable staff with a wealth of experience improving work environment practices. Because they are part of the University of Massachusetts Lowell, the SHP taps into the skills of faculty, students, and researchers at the University.

Massachusetts Office of Technical Assistance

Manufacturing in Massachusetts has long benefitted from the free, non-regulatory assistance provided by the Massachusetts Office of Technical Assistance (OTA), part of the state's Toxics Use Reduction Program. Many hospitals in the metropolitan Boston area have also worked with OTA in order to come into compliance with their limit for mercury discharges in wastewater.

OTA has recently received a grant from the US EPA-New England to assist hospitals with environmentally preferable purchasing. OTA plans to investigate alternatives to specific products used by client hospitals, help hospitals find ways to incorporate environmental values into purchasing operations, and connect interested institutions with others across the country who are also attempting to implement environmentally sensitive purchasing policies.

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